

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Literal Translations of Chinese Poems - - -

Poems by Daniel McLean, Muna Lee, Harold
Vinal, Engracia Melendez, Eda Lou Walton,
Martha Banning Thomas, and Ellen Janson -

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Chinese Poems

THE WAR CHARIOT

Tu Fu (712-770 A. D.)

In criticism of the numerous expeditions sent by the Emperor Hsüan-tsung (712-756) against the Tibetans.

Chariots roll,
Horses neigh.

BOWS and arrows at girdle have the men departing.

On foot to bid farewell—fathers, mothers, wives, sons.

The dust oh! so high that the bridge's obscured.

Some the goers' coats clasp; feet they stamp and lament in the way.

High in the air the wailing rises,

A by-passer questions the goers.

"Too oft we've been drafted"—they respond.

"At fifteen: to the North sent guarding the river

"At forty: to the West to till the soil.

"First leaving the village! the head men turban'd us.

"Back: we've grey heads but guard duty still.

"At the frontier: flowing blood collected into a sea.

"Emperor Wu's¹ ambition to advance the frontiers unsated still.

"Have you heard not, sir? in two hundred districts east of T'ai Hang,²
thousands, thousand, towns, villages, are under thistles and thorns.³

"Tho strong women handle hoe and plow
the field grain without regular east west rows?⁴

¹ The poet uses Wu-ti who reigned 140-87 B. C. in order to be immune from any lese-majeste charge that might be made by Hsüan-tsung against whose war-like projects the poet intended to be understood.

² The T'ai-Hang mountain range.

³ Left by war's ravage.

⁴ The men gone, wives did the best they knew how.

"Moreover Ch'in's soldiers are enduring fighters.
 "We were routed not unlike dogs and fowl.
 "Gentlemen tho you question: we slaves dare not complain.
 "This very winter the soldiers of the Western Pass are not recalled.
 "Yet the district magistrates demand the taxes due.
 "Whence can these taxes be derived?
 "We're convinced 'tis bad to have male children born.
 "Girls, on the contrary, have the chance to marry neighbors.
 "Males go to be buried under the grassy sod."
 Observe: all over the Blue Sea⁵ bones whiten from yore—none collected.
 New ghosts distress: old ghosts wail.
 The sky o'er cast, the rain damp: You hear sepulchral shrieks.

LOOKING OUT ON ONE DEPARTING

Shao Yeh (8th Century A. D.)

GOING up: fear I've not mounted high enough.
 But when high enough: you're far and far away.
 On thou goest: as the clouds float on and on!
 Tho back come the clouds on and on thou goest!
 Alas poor me! alone way up on this building tall.
 I gaze! I gaze! till you I see no more!
 Were I the clay in the rut I'd not let your carriage wheels turn!
 The white sun now sets the western hills behind.
 My view's cut off! my heart's broken!

SIGHS O'ER A BATTLEFIELD¹

Author unknown (6th Century A. D.)

HEAR 'em say: traveller's come.
 Make anew the toilet, sit before mirror-stand.
 Tear trace still remains.
 Face strains into a smile.

⁵ Ko-Ko-nor a region between China Tibet and the Gobi desert.

¹ The poet-author meditates on War from the point of the fighter's wife left behind.

INSCRIBED WHERE ONCE SOME ONE WAS SEEN

Ts'ui Hu (circa 9th Century A. D.)

YESTER year, this day, this gate within,
A human face with Peach blossoms vying.
Now gone that face one knows not where!
Smiles as of old: the blossoms only,
in Spring's zephyr!

EVENING HOUSE-TOP: IDLE GLANCES ROUND

Wang An-shih (1021-1086 A. D.)

FOUR ways gazing: mountain lights merge in water's gleam.
'Gainst the railing: ten miles fragrance—water-lily and lotus!
The cool breeze, the bright moon: no man hovers!
Together they make the South send to me a cool gust.

RETURN-HOME WRITING

Ho Chih-chang (born 659 A. D.)

FROM my native village a lad went;
Back to my native village an old man I return.
Accent unchanged, temple-hair gone:
Children young together see but not together recognize me,
Merrily ask: "Stranger, what place art thou come from?"

VIRTUOUS WIFE ODE

Chang Chi (8th Century A. D.)

THOU knowest I a husband have.
Yet me presentest two pearls bright.
Touched am I by your tender thought.
On my silk red jacket they're strung.
Home storied-tall. Close the Royal Palace rises.
My husband's an halberdier—Bright Light¹ within.
Know thine heart set as Sun Moon,²
Yet serving husband vowed endeavor living or dying together.³
Thy pearls two I return: tears fall.
I'm sad each met not the other ere my marriage time.

QUERY AND ANSWER IN THE HILLS

Li Po (705-762 A. D.)

I'M asked: Why make home in the blue hills?
Smile and answer not: feel serene in my mind.
Away away flows the water peach blossom laden.
This: a world totally different from the common.

*Translated by
Albion N. Fellows
and T. Y. Leo*

¹ The Royal Palace.

² As bright and pure as the Sun and the Moon.

³ One and the same room while living and together in the Tomb when dead.

Sonnet

I HAVE grown sick with pity; I would go
Out on the open hills, and breathe, and be
One with the beechen shadows, or some slow
Bright river winding peacefully to sea.
I would have nothing heavier to hold
Than a young cricket's fragile drowsy tune,
And grasses, weighted down with summer-gold,
And the long silence of the afternoon.
There are so many hearts that break and bleed;
Mine, too, grows faint; it can no longer bring
Any warm pain to meet another's need,
Or any sorrow for their suffering.
I would put all the burden down; and walk
Wide fields, and laugh, and hear the blue-jays talk.
Ellen Janson

The Flame-Trees

FOR I have reached a fairer place
Than I had dreamed to find,
With all the life that I had known
A scroll cast-off behind;

And changed into a slighter thing
The torrent of old grief
Than heavy waves that break in spray,
White on the outer reef.

And love so sure and joy so strong
That pain and sorrow are thinned
To a little mist that cannot blur
The flame-trees in the wind!
Muna Lee

Lyme Sketches

MISS ANNA

IF Miss Anna grew in a garden,
You would find her among the dahlias,
Quilled, quaint and quiet:
Inclining her head properly
Towards the bachelor-buttons
And keeping her leaf-hands folded.

LUCY

Lucy says she can stir up better cake
When she has Jean's hat on!
Her elbows describe brisk circles
Above a yellow mixing bowl,
The spoon gulps in the batter,
She whistles:
Light from the window
Bars her blue dress with plaids of sunshine.

Ask the neighbors what Lucy is,
And they'll tell you what she does.

LODO

"I know how paper-thin the ice gets
On the marshes:
How it crackles and breaks
Into brittle wafers
That lie up-tilted on the hummocks:
Crisp flakes,
Knife-edged, sharp-angled;
Ice petals
Clouded with the dust of their own destiny.
I know—"

Lodo's eyes, the color of brown leaves
In the bed of a brook,
Are amber-flecked,
"I know, but the rest . . . "
He laughs,
"They never see these things."
Martha Banning Thomas

Flight

WHO shall know the way
That her feet took,
By a sapless tree,
By a dried brook?

None woke to hear,
She left no door ajar;
Down the road of night
She went like a star.

She felt a deadman's kiss
On her, light as air,
She felt a deadman's hand
Tremble on her hair.

In the hush of dawn,
Down a trail lost,
She reached a river
That she never crossed.
Harold Vinal

Hopes

GO lingering on! The night at last must know
A waking, a tomorrow's dawn; the past,
The groping with strained senses, all must go
When darkness turns unending light at last.

The far-flung stars have each their day afar,
Which from pit-bottom now I faintly trace,
And know not which to follow, for they mar,
Like fever spots, the demon darkness' face.

Ah! little shuddering hopes, false dawns that wake
My trembling soul, to dash it in despair,
I lift my lute, and one note from it shake.
Such broken hopes, alas, I'm sick to bear!

Go lingering on, benighted traveller; still
Await the fiery dawn of thy desire
In patience, and by strong restrained will
With the deep secrets of thy soul conspire.

Daniel McLean

The Sower

HE scatters seed throughout the years,
Hopeful of what will bloom,
Though he knows that the blossoms may be tears
And the harvesting, doom.

But the fruit is the fruit of his sowing.
Brave through the world will he go,
Joyful and proud in knowing
That he had the will to sow.

Edward H. Pfeiffer

The Ladies of the Fuerte

THE ladies of the Fuerte
Are golden-eyed.
The ladies of the Fuerte
Have hair like doves' wings.
Their cheeks are dusky-golden,
Their hands are brown and strong,
Their slippers are slender as grass blades.
The ladies of the Fuerte
Bear men, know sorrow,
Bend their proud necks aching
To the yoke.
But sometimes,
In the Fuerte,
A gallant girl wakens,
A golden girl rises,
And walks magnificently naked
To beauty, to glory.

Engracia Melendez

When I Write of Love

LIKE brittle, tinted leaves
One by one falling
Words drift down
Upon my paper
From the branches
Of an unseen tree,
And the hush of a forest
Before the coming of wind
Is upon me.

Eda Lou Walton

Earth, My Heaven

NOT gold, but carven ivory,
My vanity shall be,
The limbs of me, the face of me,
Pale chiseled ivory.

No silken shroud; an aura clear
Shall garment me with grace;
Weightless, without desire or fear,
I'll drift beyond all space.

No rose; a ghostly lily be
My souvenir of earth;
Far waves of rest a couch for me,
Too tired for rebirth.

No music; quietude supreme;
No light; no will to stir;
Earth be my heaven when I dream
How love and beauty were.

Alwin West

To a Lamplighter

OLD man of mystery, the years wear thin—
Hush! Plainly I can hear your feet
Come plopping down the twilit street
Like drops of music from a violin.

What magic lurked within your taper taps!
You trod for me the shadows' husk
And stroked to life the furry dusk.
I thought you were the Sandman's son, perhaps.

Wide-eyed, I watched you wake the purring gloom
Till from your taper's yellow tip
I saw romance like honey drip—
Then someone always came and lit the room.

Old man, our street lies lost in smoke and steam;
My window pane is dull with dust;
Your torch is cracked and brown with rust,
But you, a gentle ghost, move in my dream.

And there at dusk through some far drowsing lane
You steal along the shadows' fold
To brush the dark with bubbling gold
While little blurry faces press the pane.

Mildred Plew Merryman

Clouds

EARTH dies to haze below, the cables sing,
The motor drones like some gigantic fly,
A monstrous mound of vapor bathes my wing
And backward with the wind goes sweeping by;
Above the voids white crags go sharp or dim,
Oaks wave, the discs of rootless islands swim,
And arches climb and crumble in the sun
Over gray dinosaur and mastedon.

A crawling floor of color seals the spaces
Where misty islands meet and part below;
Cities that mask eternal hungering faces,
Black wood and water mingle in its flow.
Long mountain heights beneath these marching shapes,
This marble-smooth and marble-solid air,
Their manifold reality escapes
To moon-faint mottlings. Distance does not spare.
They are the clouds now. Icy-lipped I ride
A window-floor immeasurably wide,
Firmer than worlds. And through its paved glass
I watch their formless, sunken shadows pass.

Frank Ernest Hill

Mural

MORNING is mural
In September,—
Misty and motionless,—
Rich, dim colors
Coming through thin mist,
Thin sunlight.

It is a sampler,
Closely cross-stitched on the window-screen.
. . . Tapestry, thick and flat,
In pink-brown, rust-red,
Burned orange and dull green.

Morning is mural—
I look long into it, window-framed—
Hesitant to break with footsteps
Through the thin mist,
The thin sunlight,
To test the garden path's converging lines
Which give, mystically,
Illusion of distance.

Louise Townsend Nicholl

Ghouls

BEETLES and hair-legged worms, the centipedes;
Whatever inconspicuously speeds
Beneath the mould, against the epidermis
Of earth, and holds with spring a secret kirmess,
In sombre, energetic gaiety,
That only dabblers in the dead leaves see:
Beetles and centipedes that know the dark
Keen, aromatic, scent of rotting bark:
There are no entities so intimate
In all the world with man's most certain fate.

Kenneth Slade Alling

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Something Less Than Art

Sour Grapes by William Carlos Williams. The Four Seas Company, Boston.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS'S *Sour Grapes* has an almost ancient look. Perhaps the cover jacket is responsible. It tells us of Mr. Williams's association with the imagists and the dead poetry magazine, *Others*. It tells of "cutting away old tissue and getting down to living flesh," and finally quotes from William Marion Reedy to the effect that William Carlos Williams makes one realize "how little poetry—or prose—depends on definitions, or precedents, or forms."

All this is by way of bidding the reader feel that because Mr. Williams writes in uneven length lines and uses capitals only at the beginning of sentences, his verse is likely to be fresh, unusual, and illuminative of the universe. Well, some of it is. *March* is an excellent bit of description in the conventional imagist manner. *Overture to a Dance of Locomotives* is an original conception, even an exhilarating one—a splash of idea, again descriptive, that one accepts without much worrying about details of execution. Much the same is true of *Romance Moderne*. And while I think other "line patterns" could be more effective, I quite like

Old age is
a flight of small
cheeping birds
skimming
bare trees
above a snow glaze.

Yet a great deal of the volume is not fresh, unusual, and illuminative. A great deal of it is "sour grapes" in a sense the author did not intend—it has the shapelessness and lack of savor and use that characterize unripe fruit. I fear Mr. Williams has been one of those who thought it important to prove that *vers libre* was poetry. And having thought that *vers libre* was poetry, and that this fact in itself had an importance, I fear he has tended to persuade himself that whatever he writes in this medium has a value.

This is a judgment on the volume as it is published. Of course, there was a time when almost anything published in *vers libre* could get champions. But readers of poetry are beginning to understand, after a dozen years of misunderstanding, that whether *vers libre* is poetry or not is of little consequence, that what counts is whether any given bit of it is art, and that art is perhaps harder to achieve in this new and supposedly "free" form than in the old ones. Mr. Williams may understand all this as well as anyone else. His poems do not persuade me he does. A great many of the forty odd pieces in *Sour Grapes* have nothing to recommend them except typographical eccentricity. A great many are promising but unfinished. Recurrently one finds the few whole poems and the vivid parts of poems indicating originality of viewpoint, gift of phrase, thirst for beauty. It is not for lack of ability that Mr. Williams has put his wares forth in their present state. But here they are, most of them something less than art, suggesting that free verse will in itself bring gifts to no man, that it can be doubtful or trivial as easily as rime and meter, and that a good volume of it needs as much carving as any book of couplets or sonnets.

Frank Ernest Hill

Speaking For the Tortoise

Tortoises by D. H. Lawrence. Thomas Selzer, New York.

ACCORDING to that ancient fable, in which the tortoise figures so conspicuously, for all his ungainliness and heaviness and stupidity, he did, in the end, outrun beauty and swiftness and grace. He was allowed, at least, the dignity of triumph. And through his legendary victory persistence has become a virtue, endurance and tenaciousness qualities to which many a child clings with pitiable faith during the serious test of a race.

Mr. Lawrence's tortoises are not for children. They are not traditional tortoises at all, but they are very much traditional Lawrence. In the race they run there is no visible competitor, no well-defined goal, no triumph,

no moral. Their doggedness and fortitude are of as little avail as inertia and despair, or keenness and strength, in their struggle against the great pursuer, Sex, that "Moloch," as Mr. Lawrence calls it in another book, which is about men, not tortoises.

The race is not so much a race as a pursuit, not so much a pursuit as a quest, in which the tortoise and the man writing of him are eternally and irrevocably associated. The poet sees much of himself in this humble, ponderous, bewildered creature. Even the cross, which man has accepted for the symbol of his own particular burden, is plainly marked in the very marrow and bone of his fellow agonizer. They are both equally "doomed in the long crucifixion of desire."

The awe in this book is never grotesque nor the terror ridiculous, its immense pity and tenderness only strengthened by the irony of some of the titles, and the satisfying quaintness in such descriptions as this one of the baby tortoise—

"The first little mathematical gentleman
Stepping, wee mite, in his loose trousers
Under all the eternal dome of mathematical law."

It would have been very easy to dribble over into the sentimental, and there are moments, it must be confessed, when such a catastrophe seems perilously close.

It is during those moments, when the otherwise unflinching artistry almost yields to mere quiverings, that one's attention turns from the tortoise to become fixed upon Mr. Lawrence. He is the one, after all, and not the Lord, "who has written it all down on the little slate of the baby tortoise." One can not help wondering if the tortoise really takes himself with such solemn earnestness, and one rather resents the fact that he is not able to retaliate by writing down all that he imagines into mankind on Mr. Lawrence.

The last poem is called *Tortoise Shout*. Under this title surely one might expect that now the inarticulate would speak for itself. But the voice is still the poet's, speaking, it must be admitted, with sincere and memorable passion. Here again is heard that hope in fulfillment, that conflict between the longing for individual dignity and the fear of mutilated loneliness which cries through so much of Lawrence's work.

"The same cry from the tortoise as from Christ,
the Osiris-cry of abandonment,
That which is whole, torn asunder,
That which is in part, finding its whole again
throughout the universe."

Winifred Welles

Not Fairies, Animals!

Fairy Bread, by Laura Benét. Thomas Seltzer. New York

THE magic machinery creaks a little in this book, Laura Benét has not fed on honey-dew, nor yet drunk the milk of Paradise. Not one poem here has the spell in Edna Millay's *Witch Wife*: Elinor Wylie is compounded of magic, but she never says the word. Magic, magic, magic, when there is no magic, is likely to turn the reader away empty, before he has found the real delight of this book.

A poet should never *say* what he would *create*. Laura Benét has done this, because she really does not find any fascination in fairies. Her poetic excitement is elsewhere. I know of no poet who has anything like Miss Benét's quality when she treats animals, unless it is Ralph Hodgson. The Englishman is conscious of his love and is therefore more single and fascinating, but Laura Benét has a note of distinction in *Cushy Cow*, *She Wandered After Strange Gods*, and *Little Fishes*.

In the first poem a kind of ragged realism—the broken gate, and the leavings that run all over the yard—make possible and effective the lines:

Where grey elves hung on her haunches,
And nuzzled her grazing nose.

OR:

She suckles elf babies still, by night,
Who wither on cow-slip wine.

However, so true is Miss Benét's talent for quaintly rugged effects that these fairy passages only succeed, it seems to me, by the fact that *haunches*, *nuzzled*, *grazing-nose*, *suckles*, and *wither* are all words of intense actual connotation.

One need care for one thing only (if one care enough), and hear it with all one's ears and see it with all one's eyes, in order to dare be a poet. I like Laura Benét's sense of sound and her imagery, when it is concerned with cows, horses, and fishes. Why not go on to squirrels and dogs and snakes and tadpoles, and all other creatures? She is sure to find magic (which is really nothing more than the glint and tremor of life) in these. I would rather write

Tumbling in twenty rings
Into the grass

Hodgson's lines on a snake, than be crowned Poet Laureate of Fairy-land.

Genevieve Taggard

Contributors

The translators of the Chinese poems, ALBION N. FELLOWS, originally of Mount Vernon, Iowa, and T. Y. LEO, a native of Peking, China, in this selected group from their work, offer interesting comparisons with other versions. Their theory of translation is that a close, literal rendering preserves and interprets the spirit of the original more truly than the freer, more elaborate manner.

MUNA LEE (Mrs. Luis Munoz Marin), now lives in Teaneck, N. J.

EDWARD H. PFEIFFER lives in Redlands, California.

HAROLD VINAL is the editor of *Voices*, a poetry magazine published in Boston. His first volume, *White April*, has just been brought out by the Yale University Press.

ENGRACIA MELENDEZ is a young Spanish-American now living in California. This is among her first work published in this country.

ALWIN WEST lives in Brooklyn, N. Y., and has contributed verse to several magazines.

MARTHA BANNING THOMAS has lived in Lyme, Conn., but is at present a member of Grace Hazard Conkling's poetry class at Smith College.

DANIEL MCLEAN is a native of Inverness, Scotland. During the war he served with the Cameron Highlanders and in the Aviation Service, and was severely wounded. After recovering, he went to South America to assist in starting an aerial mail route at Buenos Aires. After another severe hospital experience in this country, during which he began to write, he is now on his way home to Scotland.

MILDRED PLEW MERRYMAN, EDA LOU WALTON, KENNETH SLADE ALLING, and ELLEN JANSON are well-known to the readers of THE MEASURE.

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